REMARKS

Claims 1-21 are in the application.

Independent claims 1 and 18 now specify that the plurality of individual tubes that define the passages have thin walls and are supported in parallel spaced-apart relation with open spaces between them so that when the assembly is placed in an autoclave as described in the second paragraph of the specification, the hot sterilant can circulate around the tubes to heat and sterilize the tube contents in a minimum amount of time. In other words, medical instruments in the tube passages can be sterilized much more efficiently than would be the case if the sterilant could only flow through the relatively small diameter passages themselves.

Thus, contrary to the Examiner's responsive arguments in paragraph 11 of the Final Rejection, it does make a difference whether or not the spaces between the tubes of the assembly are open. It is also important that the tubes have relatively thin walls as shown in Applicant's Fig. 5, for example, so that heat from the circulating sterilant will be conducted efficiently to the interiors of the tubes.

It is clear that the bit container described in Yee et al does not satisfy the requirements of claims 1 and 18 as now presented. The base 10 of that container is a solid block having orifices or passages 22 for receiving dental devices 42. Even if the orifices 22 may be viewed as thin-walled tubes, which we contend is an unreasonable interpretation, there are no spaces between the orifices 22 in which hot sterilant may circulate when that con-

tainer is placed in an autoclave. In other words, since base 10 is made of a "plastic material", Pat. Col. 3, line 4, which is a known thermal insulator, the medical devices 42 can only be sterilized by sterilant flowing through the orifices 42 and their long, restricted-diameter drainage passages 24. Clearly then, it would take much longer to sterilize instruments in Yee's container than in Applicant's claimed assembly.

Indeed, the Examiner's observation in paragraph 11 of the final rejection that when the sterilizing fluid is injected into Yee's orifices 44 of figure 2, it is capable of circulating around from one of the orifices 44 in a circle down one of the unlabeled tubes and out from drainage passage 24 acknowledges the fact that medical devices 42 in Yee's container are heated only by the steam that flows through the restricted drainage passages 24. In complete contrast to that, medical devices in Applicant's assembly receive heat from all the steam circulating in the open spaces between the tubes containing the medical devices, as well as the steam actually flowing through the tube passages. In sum, using Applicant's assembly, less autoclave time would be required to properly sterilize the medical devices.

Claims 2-17 dependent upon claim 1 and claims 19-21 dependent upon 18 should be allowed for the same reasons.

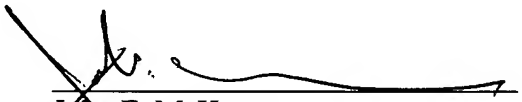
The Friedman reference applied against claims 10-13 and 17-18 has an open base defining a single large space (passage). Therefore, it does not address the above-mentioned deficiencies in Yee et al. Moreover, that being the case, that reference cannot possibly suggest cooperation between a plurality of passage-defining tubes in a base and passage-defining sleeves in a cover. In other words, while Friedman may disclose a plu-

rality of sleeves in a cover, it does not teach that those sleeves should be arranged and adopted to mate with corresponding tubes in a base.

For the foregoing reasons, claims 1-21 should be allowed.

Please charge any additional fee occasioned by this paper to our Deposit Account No. 03-1237.

Respectfully submitted,



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